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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [EPET](#) [UNSC](#) [RU](#) [IR](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: PUTIN VISITS DOHA BUT NO TANGIBLE RESULTS

Derived from: DSCG 05-1, B,D.

¶11. (C) Summary. Russian president Vladimir Putin met with the Qatari Amir in Doha February 12. The two agreed on the need for a Middle East peace conference, the date and locale of which was undefined. The two also agreed on holding discussions on an OPEC-like organization for gas producers at the international gas forum in Doha in April. Agreements on consular matters, oil, bilateral investment, and business were signed, but there were no concrete projects to emerge.
End Summary.

¶12. (U) Russian president Vladimir Putin visited Doha for five hours February 12 midway through his Middle East tour also including Riyadh and Amman. Putin's meeting with the Qatari Amir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, included a one-on-one session; Putin later attended a press conference with the Amir. Putin was accompanied by his foreign minister, the president of Lukoil, the deputy minister of economic development, the president of the Russian-Arab Business Council, and the president of Gazprom. Russian and Qatari officials signed an agreement on cooperation in consular matters, a memorandum of understanding between Lukoil and Qatar Petroleum, an agreement on protection of investments, and an agreement setting up a Russian-Qatari Business Council.

Readout from the Russian Embassy

¶13. (C) The DCM at the Russian Embassy, Pavel Yakovenko, told P/E Chief February 14 that the heads of state discussed and agreed on a range of issues. Putin proposed organizing a Middle East peace conference similar to the Madrid conference that led to the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, and the Amir supported the idea. Yakovenko said the idea was not new, and the date, place, and participants had yet to be determined. The two leaders discussed the idea of an OPEC-like structure to regulate natural gas prices, and they agreed to address the question at the a forum that Doha will host in April. Yakovenko said that Russia, the world's largest gas producer and owner of the largest reserves, believes that gas is "cheap" in BTU terms relative to oil and this is unfair. He said gas exporters need a "structure" to help formulate prices, though the structure would necessarily be different from OPEC because of the differences in supply, marketing, and contracts. He said the idea is not new.

¶14. (C) Yakovenko reported that a major focus of the visit was boosting bilateral trade ties. He pegged Russia's trade with Qatar at a mere USD 5 million, and said the two leaders discussed Russian investment opportunities in iron and steel and Qatari opportunities in Russian equities, particularly Gazprom. Yakovenko said that all discussions were "in principle" and no deals were struck. He described the creation of a Russian-Qatari Business Council, which was

formally inaugurated the following day at a forum for Russian businessmen, as an accomplishment.

Security Council Cooperation

¶15. (C) Russia and Qatar are in "close agreement" on a range of important issues from the Middle East peace process to security for the region, Yakovenko said. He said the two countries are in close consultation at the UN Security Council. Regarding Iran, Yakovenko said that Qatar "will do anything" as long as there is consensus among the Security Council's permanent members.

¶16. (C) Putin's visit was "difficult" to bring about, the Russian diplomat, a 30-year Middle East veteran, said. The Amir visited Russia in 2001, and the two met again in Asia in ¶2003. In 2004, the assassination of former Chechen president Zalemkhan Yanderbayev in Doha, presumably by Russian agents, strained relations, although the Russian Ambassador remained in Doha. Yakovenko said that Putin's visit signaled a turning of that page.

Qatari Observers Skeptical

¶17. (C) Qatari intellectuals were largely distrustful of Putin and his objectives. One Embassy contact, an academic, said that Russia had lost the cold war due to its internal economic problems. It is still regarded as having major internal difficulties, and for this reason will not be successful in leveraging its international political weight. He observed that Russia's foreign policy is shifting not just

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in the Middle East but in other regions as well.

¶18. (C) Another Qatari thinker, in the media sector, told us that Qatari businessmen will remain unlikely to invest in Russia because of its lack of transparency, security concerns, and uncertain legal framework. He said that Arabs have a negative attitude toward Russia because of its treatment of the Muslim population in Chechnya. He said it would be difficult for Russia to counter the strong preferences of the Gulf's elites for American education, economic and business practices, popular culture, travel, and investment. He believes Putin "could make some progress" because of popular dissatisfaction with American foreign policy "if he markets himself in the right way."

Limited Press Analysis

¶19. (U) Qatari press devoted headline coverage to the visit and the agreements that emerged. Editorial analysis was superficial and praised both leaders for their vision in supporting Middle East peace.

Comment

¶10. (C) The visit of the Russian president to Qatar focused on a number of hot issues: Middle East peace, an OPEC-like organization for gas producers, and Russia's renewed embrace of the Arab region. However, despite the four agreements signed here, nothing concrete emerged: there is no date or place for the proposed Middle East peace conference; the gas-OPEC idea has been kicked down the road to April; no investment projects were signed; and Qatari investors remain unconvinced. Russia's courtship of Gulf states will evidently be a long one.

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